Marta Kierska

Taboo-breaking social campaigns in the light of theory of influence and persuasion.

A sociological and semantic study. A sociological and semiological study.

The galloping consumerism, supported and motivated by various multidimensional advertising activities, provided an impulse to take up this particular topic. A systematic observation of the environment allows us to notice, however, that among the various commercial advertising campaigns attacking us, the consumers, social campaigns are becoming increasingly noticeable. Social campaigns and their ways of capturing the recipients' attention have become the focus of research in this work. Especially, that in the abundance of information reaching the recipient from outside, the recipient seems to "go blind" to this information. This, in turn, has a negative impact on social campaigns and consequently on the attention being paid to the issues raised by them. In addition, the research interest in social campaigns is still small (although increasing). The subject also allows the author to combine her interests, oscillating around the sociology of advertising and social psychology.

The primary cognitive objective of this study was to increase the range of theoretical knowledge on the theory of social influence and persuasion, as well as socio-semantic analysis of the research material represented by social campaigns. Another cognitive objective was to acquire a new understanding in the field of social campaigns issued both in Poland and worldwide. Expanding the knowledge of social campaigns focused on the issues addressed by them. Apart from the cognitive objectives, practical objectives were also distinguished. The first practical objective was to verify the leading hypothesis and six specific hypotheses. The second practical objective was to broaden the knowledge and acquire increased understanding regarding the methods of reaching the audience used in social campaigns.

The study consists of three parts. The first part covers the scientific basis of the problems addressed in this work. It consists of three chapters subsequently addressing the issues of: social impact and persuasion, key attributes of social campaigns and the use of semiotics in the analysis of social campaigns. The second deals with methodological issues

used in the course of the research. It includes two chapters on general concepts and methodological assumptions adopted in the work. The third and concluding part of the work includes the results of the author's own empirical research. It consists of two chapters. The first chapter includes a subjective review of selected shocking social campaigns. The second chapter represents an analysis of these campaigns. In addition to the sections indicated, the work has an introduction and a conclusion.

For the purposes of this study, a subjective selection of 31 social campaigns issued in various countries was performed. All campaigns were divided into three categories: ecology, health, and human rights. Having regard to this division, the campaigns have been subjectively described. They were then analysed in the light of theory of social influence and persuasion. Particular attention was directed to the elements presented in their studies by Robert Cialdini (principles of social influence) and Michał Gajlewicz (types of persuasive techniques), as well as elements like the mood, the colours used in the advertisement and the emotions evoked. The campaigns were then subjected to semantic and semiotic analysis. This analysis was based on the model proposed by Barbara Frątczak-Rudnicka (a model of semiotic analysis of persuasive messages), based on the achievements of Umberto Eco. In addition to the foregoing analysis, a comparative table was produced, including the following elements: the plane of action, the dominant form of the message, the dominant functions of the message and the dominant means of persuasion.

The analysed campaigns have demonstrated that whether the campaign will be noticed appears to depend on the persuasive elements employed in the message. The symbolism applied also seems to be significant. It was also noticeable that the creators of social campaigns were keen on using their established ways to capture the attention of the target group. Such solutions included, for example: exposing brutality, showing nudity, using religious symbols. These elements seem to influence the audience, often evoking extreme emotions such as shock, fear, disgust or compassion.

Regardless of the solutions employed in the message, each campaign was aimed at capturing the attention of the recipient and appropriately strengthening the message. It is also worth mentioning that in each of the three above-mentioned campaign categories, a different element was prevalent, which was supposed to capture the recipient's attention and evoke the desired emotions (expected by the campaign's creators) and finally, action. However, a certain correlation could be discerned. Campaigns that targeted the general public employed more

drastic messages than those campaigns that had a well-defined target audience. The latter seemed to present elements that were clearly relevant to the target group. That is why such messages could include less drastic or less controversial elements. Another interesting correlation across all the campaigns analysed was to encourage change, regardless of what the message itself was about.

The conducted analyses allowed us to observe that social campaigns represent a complicated and complex method of communication. They address delicate topics, often taboo subjects. All of the analysed social campaigns, however, used interesting and creative ways of "taming" the topics challenging for the audience, at the same time completely renouncing moralising. This is supremely significant in case of campaigns targeted at young people who tend to accept the lectures from adults extremely reluctantly.

Despite the fact that the conducted research allowed to confirm the primary hypothesis that taboo-breaking social campaigns are based on theories of social influence and persuasion, employ the tools of semiotics to increase their effectiveness and made it possible to derive a number of interesting conclusions, it should be recognized that any analyses included in this work were based on subjective inquiries. The opinions of campaign creators, broadcasters or target groups were not used in the analyses. As a result, this work should become a starting point for further research which will involve not only psychologists and sociologists but also representatives of such sciences as law, economics and marketing.